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SUBJECT: Update: Testing Fiji's National Pandemic Influenza Plan

REF: Suva 0317

11. (SBU) Summary: The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) in close collaboration with the Fiji National Influenza Taskforce brought together different sectors to test Fiji's National Influenza Pandemic Plan on December 4 and 5, 2007. During the tabletop testing, gaps/issues were identified in the Plan. Lack of leadership within the government was one of the key concerns highlighted by SPC. Notably, the Ministry of Agriculture has still not completed its avian influenza plan. A lack resources remains a major constraint, limiting both preparedness planning and response capacity. End Summary.

12. (U) The two-day workshop was held on December 4 and 5, 2007 to identify gaps in the Fiji National Influenza Pandemic Plan (FiNIP) and to see how the different sectors could best progress their plans. The Workshop was organized by SPC in close collaboration with the Fiji National Influenza Task Force. 72 participants from different sectors took part in the tabletop test workshop. Participants included representatives from the media, Fiji Red-Cross, Fiji Military, Fiji Police, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health (included provincial level officers), Ministry of Education, Fiji School of Medicine and Nursing, Fiji Islands Marine Safety Administration and Quarantine and Customs officials. Stakeholders who were invited but did not turn up included the Ministry of Tourism, the Prime Minister's Office, the National Disaster Management Office, Banks, the Airline Industry, Airports Fiji Limited, and the Fiji Electricity Authority.

13. (SBU) During the workshop a number of gaps/issues were identified. According to Dr. Narendra Singh, the Communicable Disease and Surveillance Specialist at SPC who coordinated the event, one of the key issues was the lack of leadership to move the plan forward. In his view, the main reasons for this leadership shortfall are a lack of awareness, initiative and understanding of the potential impacts of a pandemic influenza. The Fiji National Influenza Pandemic Plan Task Force is currently chaired by the Ministry of Health. Singh told us that some sectors feel that this task should be transferred to the National Disaster Management Office.

14. (SBU) Singh said there is also a need for line ministry officials to secure political support for the National Plan. In addition, the relevant ministries did not request the necessary funds in their 2008 budget submissions. As a result, no budget has been allocated for finalization or implementation of the National Plan for the coming year. Nevertheless, SPC will work with the line ministries and the Fiji National Influenza Pandemic Plan Task Force over the

next few months to try to address some of the gaps/issues identified during the 2-day workshop.

15. (SBU) The Ministry of Agriculture's national plan for avian influenza remains incomplete. As reported earlier (reftel), the Ministry of Health has received plans from two large commercial poultry farms in Fiji. Dr. Robin Achari (Principal Veterinary Officer at the Ministry of Agriculture's Animal Health and Production Division), told us that the delay is caused by the need for the Ministry of Agriculture to revise its plan using the SPC template, which it did not have until recently. Dr. Achari also said that lack of human and financial resources have hindered progress at his ministry. He told us that Agriculture hopes to complete its plan by March 2008.

16. (SBU) Comment: Actors outside of the health sector remain relatively unengaged in the planning process, and a lack of financial and technical resources continues to be a serious constraint, limiting both planning and national capacity to respond to any future influenza outbreak. The fact that this under-resourcing of the National Plan is partly a function of internal decision-making does not make it any less of a factor in the country's ability to prepare for or respond to a crisis.

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